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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 49th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. VILCHEZ ASHER (Nicaragua)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELLE

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 138: ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY ASPECTS OF THE FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS (continued)

(a) FINANCING OF THE UNITED NATIONS PEACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS (continued)

Support account for peace-keeping operations (A/50/874 and Corr. 1, 876 and 897)

1. Mr. TAKASU (Controller), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the support account for peace-keeping operations (A/50/876), said that it was being submitted pursuant to General Assembly decision 50/473, in which the Assembly had in particular decided to review at its resumed session the methodology for financing the support account, in the light of the changing requirements for and nature of backstopping of peace-keeping operations at Headquarters. He recalled that in his statement of 28 November 1995, he had drawn the Committee's attention to the fact that if the current methodology and formula (8.5 per cent of the civilian staff component of the budget of each mission) were retained unchanged, support account funds available in 1996 would be about half those for 1995. It would be necessary to reduce immediately and drastically the current number of Headquarters posts (408 posts) funded from the support account. However, that was simply not feasible given that there would not be a corresponding immediate reduction in the number of missions and in the amount of backstopping work at Headquarters.

2. Accordingly, the Secretary-General had conducted a comprehensive review of the method of funding support services and the workload they represented. The results were set out in document A/50/876. It should be recalled at the outset that the current methodology was established by the General Assembly in 1990 and that it was intended to allow the funding of 92 overload posts corresponding to backstopping for the five missions then active. The funding was based on a set percentage, namely, 8.5 per cent of the cost of the civilian staff component of the ongoing missions. That methodology was no longer appropriate to the current situation. Since the establishment of the support account, peace-keeping operations had expanded considerably and their nature had changed, thus affecting the overall amount of backstopping that needed to be performed. The "civilian staff component" was no longer an adequate basis for calculation. The current methodology did not take account of the fact that backstopping requirements for a given mission continued for a long period after the completion of its political mandate. The required services included the processing of claims for reimbursement submitted by Governments and other parties, asset allocation and many other tasks.

3. The Secretary-General undertook to determine the minimum backstopping requirements for the coming 15 months, namely, until June 1997, taking into account the new budgetary cycle that would be in effect starting on 1 July 1996, the changes in the nature, scope and scale of the peace-keeping missions and the need for greater cost-efficiency. He thus arrived at a revised support account staffing establishment of 355 posts (as against the 408 posts currently authorized). Although the revised level entailed the redistribution and

doubling-up of work assignments and was likely to affect the timeliness of certain work, involving compromises in terms of quality, it should be possible to provide indispensable services at Headquarters in a satisfactory way. Annexes I and II of the report indicated the current and proposed distribution of posts by organizational unit and grade level.

4. Three funding options had been considered to replace the current methodology. The first would be to revise the current formula percentage upwards. The Secretary-General believed that would not provide an adequate and predictable level of resources to meet the minimum requirements at Headquarters. The second option would involve expanding the bases for calculation to take into account several other factors such as the military and/or the civilian police components of missions. That option would, however, not address the volatility issue and other weaknesses of the current methodology, in particular, the inability to take into account and finance backstopping of completed and closed missions. The Secretary-General was therefore recommending a third option, which seemed the most practical and logical one: he proposed that the General Assembly should begin by determining the minimum requirements for backstopping activities for the subsequent 12-month period while at the same time setting up a proposed 12-month budget for each of the peace-keeping operations. Within the framework of that annual budgetary cycle, estimated expenditures would be submitted to the Secretary-General and to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) for the corresponding posts to be funded from the support account and for related resource requirements; budget estimates would then be prepared and Member States advised of their assessments. The initial proposal had been to send Member States individual assessment notices for each peace-keeping operation, but in keeping with the ACABQ recommendation, the necessary funds would be prorated after an analysis of the overall requirements. The Secretary-General was convinced that the new approach would provide the Secretariat with the adequate and predictable annual level of resources necessary to meet the minimum backstopping requirements at Headquarters. It would also facilitate the ability to recruit and retain the highly qualified personnel needed for backstopping functions. The Secretariat fully endorsed the recommendations made by ACABQ regarding funding methods.

5. Steps that the Committee and the General Assembly might wish to take were outlined in paragraph 39 of the report. If they were approved, the new funding system would enter into effect starting on 1 July 1996.

6. With regard to the bridging period (1 April-30 June), the Secretary-General proposed, in the interest of an orderly transition, that the General Assembly should approve continuation of the posts it had authorized up until the end of March, on the understanding that the current vacancy rate would not be changed. For the period from 1 January to 30 June 1996, he was requesting a total of $60 million estimated according to the current methodology. Should the new proposed methodology be approved, he was requesting, for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, a total gross amount of $37.2 million (net amount: $31.3 million).

7. Mr. ADZA (Board of Auditors), speaking on behalf of the Chairman of the Board of Auditors, the Auditor General of Ghana, introduced the report of the Board on the audit conducted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 49/250, of

the support account for peace-keeping operations for the period ending 30 September 1995 (A/50/874 and Corr.1).

8. The audit had focused on the review of the objectives and functions for which the support account had been established, the methodology for the calculation of contributions to the account and the significance of contributions-in-kind to the resources of the account. The Board had also examined the operational results of the support account, the recruitment and placement procedures for posts, the contractual terms of appointees and the utilization of approved human resources. The Board had further evaluated the status of the 61 general temporary assistance positions authorized by the General Assembly, on an exceptional basis, to be converted to temporary posts for the period from 1 July 1995 to 31 January 1996.

9. He drew attention to the main findings and recommendations contained in the report. The growth in the number and complexity of peace-keeping operations since 1990 justified the continuing need for the support account. Further, the temporary nature of the funding arrangement as originally conceived had proved to be inadequate to provide backstopping services on a continuing basis. Compared with the established funding level of 8.5 per cent, the expenditure incurred at Headquarters on staff costs and common services in support of backstopping of peace-keeping operations for a five-year period averaged 8.2 per cent; the support account thus provided 0.3 per cent in excess funds. However, the yearly percentages for 1994 (9.08) and 1995 (11.25) reflected an increasing level of expenditure over the established percentage.

10. It should be noted that the submissions of staff requirements did not indicate the value of contributions to the support account in the form of military officers released on loan by some Member States. As a result, some submissions had been made for posts already being encumbered free of charge by military officers on loan, thus providing a cushion in the support account budget.

11. Two Professional posts and several General Service posts had been redeployed at levels or for functions not consistent with those authorized by the General Assembly, because of the existence of binding contracts and the need for operational flexibility. Moreover, some of the support account posts approved for the Office of Human Resources Management in 1995 for backstopping of peace-keeping operations had not been surrendered to the Department of Peace-keeping Operations, to which the specified functions had subsequently been relocated.

12. Job descriptions for 28 out of the 61 authorized converted temporary posts had not been prepared to enable the posts to be formally classified and advertised to regularize appointments to the posts as required by General Assembly resolution 49/250.

13. Furthermore, the report emphasized the need to review the temporary nature of the funding arrangement to reflect the current need for a mix of temporary and permanent arrangements. In the Board's view, to improve transparency in the estimation and utilization of support account resources, the value of non-reimbursable contributions in kind from Member States should be disclosed.

14. Lastly, the Department of Peace-keeping Operations should expedite the compilation of job descriptions for its units for subsequent classification to enable the relevant support account posts to be properly encumbered.

15. Mr. MSELLE (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) welcomed the conclusions and recommendations of the Board of Auditors, but observed that, if the Board had had more time, its report (A/50/874) would have been fuller. He believed that in the future the deadlines for the submission of audit reports to the General Assembly should be established in consultation with the Board of Auditors.

16. As expected, the Board of Auditors had found certain shortcomings in the management of the support account, particularly in the management of staff. It had concluded that the concept of the support account remained valid but that the funding formula was out of date and needed to be reviewed. The problems identified by the Board of Auditors were due to the rapid increase in peace-keeping operations between 1991 and 1995 and the slow pace with which the Secretariat had dealt with the situation. He believed that the reforms which had been adopted (the introduction of a new budgetary and financial cycle for peace-keeping operations, the streamlining of personnel procedures and the adjustment of the Financial Regulations and Rules to meet the needs of peace-keeping operations) would go a long way towards resolving many of the problems. The Advisory Committee requested the Board of Auditors to follow up on the implementation of its recommendations.

17. The Advisory Committee recommended that the General Assembly should authorize an additional amount, as requested by the Secretary-General, for the period from 1 April to 30 June 1996, namely $7,213,300 (gross), for post and non-post requirements, including 370 posts (instead of the 408 proposed by the Secretary-General), that amount to be financed on the basis of the current support account funding formula. It also recommended that the General Assembly should authorize, for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, an amount of $37,236,200 gross ($31,346,400 net) and a staffing level of 355 posts, subject to the observations contained in its report (A/50/897).

18. The Advisory Committee had noted a number of areas in which it was not clear on what basis the Secretary-General had arrived at the proposals regarding staffing and resource requirements contained in the report on the support account (A/50/876). It believed that the impact of recent reforms, the introduction of new technology and the number and size of peace-keeping operations planned for the coming financial period had been understated. With regard to the military officers provided by Member States at no cost, the Advisory Committee requested the Secretary-General to submit without delay the report which it had requested at the forty-eighth session, a request which had been endorsed by the General Assembly. While the Advisory Committee had no objection in principle to the Secretariat making use of the services of the officers seconded to it, since those officers had contributed expertise which the Organization lacked, it believed that the fundamental issues raised by that practice should be examined carefully by the Advisory Committee and the General Assembly.

19. On the question of the funding of the support account, the Board of Auditors and the Secretary-General had noted that the scope of coverage of the support account was much wider than when it had been established. The Secretary-General had concluded that as long as the funding formula remained unchanged the income generated would be insufficient to provide the support services required. Barely 200 posts would be funded, rather than the 355 proposed for inclusion in the staffing table. Even though the Advisory Committee did not fully share the view of the Secretary-General and did not recommend a reduction in the staffing level proposed, it called for a review of the posts.

20. After examining the three options proposed by the Secretary-General for the funding of the support account, the Advisory Committee had not endorsed the solution he had recommended, namely that the resources financed through the support account should be appropriated and assessed separately for each operation. The Advisory Committee had, however, recommended the establishment of an annual budget for the support account in its report A/47/757 and its recommendation had been approved by the General Assembly in resolution 49/250 of 20 July 1995, in line with resolution 49/233 of 23 December 1994 authorizing a new budgetary cycle. The Advisory Committee recommended the adoption of a procedure which had been examined in the report of the Secretary-General in document A/48/470 but which had not been accepted because of the multiplicity of budgetary periods for peace-keeping operations. Since the budgetary process had now been streamlined, the Advisory Committee believed, as was confirmed by the Controller (A/50/897, annex II, appendix), that prorating the support account resource requirements among the individual peace-keeping operations budgets was now feasible.

21. After recalling the recommendations adopted by the Advisory Committee on the need to simplify the procedures for the preparation and consideration of reports relating to the support account, he said he hoped that the Committee would concentrate more on monitoring the implementation of decisions taken by the General Assembly, including the recommendations relating to the redeployment of posts and the use of staff resources contained in resolution 49/250. The Advisory Committee had not considered post by post the proposals put forward by the Secretary-General concerning the redeployment of posts, as it had done in the past. It had made a number of observations which the Secretary-General should take into account in his next report on the support account.

22. Mr. GJESDAL (Norway) said that resource needs for peace-keeping, including a stronger capacity to supervise and direct missions, should be funded through the regular budget to the extent possible. The Secretary-General should be provided with the resources needed to carry out current operations and to meet the backstopping requirements of the liquidation of operations that had ended their mandates. However, in view of the difficulty of backstopping the current volume of peace-keeping operations with the staff resources provided for under the regular budget, support account funding must continue to play an important role in the foreseeable future.

23. His delegation noted the Secretary-General's position, stated in document A/50/876, that backstopping functions at Headquarters required a permanent core capacity, a variable capacity to support ongoing operations and an additional

capacity to support the liquidation of completed missions. It also noted with interest the Secretary-General's view that the core capacity should be funded from the regular budget and that the variable and additional capacity should be funded from the support account. His delegation therefore disagreed with the Advisory Committee's view that the concept of "permanent core capacity" was not a useful one. It believed that the concept was indispensable for the purposes of discussions on the programme budget.

24. No one had foreseen the scope, scale and complexity of the work involved in the closing phases of peace-keeping operations. In that connection, he recalled the troubling findings contained in the preliminary report of the Board of Auditors on the liquidation of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (A/49/943). The dismantling of an operation involved a considerable amount of work in terms of liquidating assets, processing claims for reimbursement from troop contributors and litigation arising from disputes. His delegation believed that the Secretary-General's proposal for a new funding method for the support account, based on actual backstopping requirements as foreseen at the time of the adoption of an annual support account budget, was very timely. That method would avoid "backward budgeting" by taking into account future backstopping requirements and would not be rigidly linked to an arbitrary percentage based on previous operations. Moreover, the proposal was in keeping with the recommendations of the Board of Auditors. His delegation also supported the Advisory Committee's proposal that the budget requirements of the support account should be divided among ongoing operations on a pro rata basis.

25. In his delegation's view, reform of the funding mechanism for the support account was one of three important reforms that must be introduced in the financing of peace-keeping operations; the other two concerned the reimbursement system for contingent-owned equipment and the standardization of United Nations compensation for death and disability.

26. With regard to future resource requirements under the support account, his delegation supported the position of the Secretary-General and the Advisory Committee that the 370 backstopping posts at Headquarters should be maintained from April to the end of June 1996, and that 355 posts should be funded thereafter for the budget year from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997. Such a staffing level was fully warranted by the scale of the ongoing and new operations, the liquidation of some major operations and the continuing work on reform of the administrative and budgetary aspects of peace-keeping operations.

27. Mr. LUZINSKY (Russian Federation) said he regretted that the reports of the Advisory Committee and of the Secretary-General had been issued late. The delay had complicated the work of delegations in considering a particularly complex issue. While his delegation was aware of the objective difficulties that had contributed to the situation, it hoped that in future documents would be distributed in a more timely fashion.

28. His delegation shared all the concerns of the Secretary-General about the funding system for the support account and felt that the time had come to review that system, in view of the obvious impact of a substantial reduction in peace-keeping operations. The Secretary-General's report contained a great deal of

useful information. His delegation would, however, have liked to receive the information on the use of the support account resources over the previous calendar year which the General Assembly had expressly requested. His delegation also regretted that the results of the audits of such important issues as the role and use of extrabudgetary resources, including loaned personnel, were not yet available. Those issues were influential, if not determining, factors in the Committee's decisions in that connection.

29. Since it was necessary to ensure a minimum level of resources for the support account, his delegation supported the Advisory Committee's proposal that the amount of resources needed should be determined and then prorated among the individual peace-keeping operation budgets. Apart from the considerations set forth in paragraph 37 of the Advisory Committee's report, that formula would link each operation's budget to the overall volume of resources allocated to peace-keeping and would provide a sort of indicator of the effectiveness of the use of resources under the account. In addition, an ad hoc financing system (annual review of cost estimates) also seemed desirable at the current time, in view of the changing nature of peace-keeping activities.

30. With respect to the specific volume of financial and staffing resources requested by the Secretary-General, his delegation endorsed the changes proposed by the Advisory Committee. Before taking a decision, it would like the Secretariat to provide additional explanations on the cost of renting office space in the FF building.

31. In conclusion, his delegation endorsed the comments of ACABQ on the Secretary-General's comprehensive review, particularly with respect to the need to analyse carefully the practice of using personnel provided gratis, the impact of technological innovations on the amount of resources needed, the special attention with which the Secretariat should handle claims for reimbursement from Member States arising from their participation in peace-keeping operations and the need to comply with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 49/250 with regard to the provision of information on the redistribution of posts.

32. Ms. SHENWICK (United States of America) welcomed the Secretary-General's proposal that the current support account funding formula should be replaced by a method more in keeping with the Organization's budgetary practices. However, her country could support, after discussion, the changes suggested by the Advisory Committee or the latter's proposal that a separate budget section should not be established for the calculation of support account resources.

33. With regard to the resources to be allocated for the period from 1 July 1996 to 30 June 1997, her delegation was concerned about a number of resource proposals put forward by the Secretary-General for the Department of Administration and Management, particularly with respect to the staffing table for some administrative units (mail, communications) and the total number of secretaries, which, in her view, was too high in relation to the number of Professional posts. It was also concerned about the reduction of two audit posts in the Office of Internal Oversight Services, in view of the number of peace-keeping operations to be liquidated. It was surprised that some services within the Department of Peace-keeping Operations had not been able to request additional resources, whereas the secretariat of the Advisory Committee had

obtained a 150-per-cent increase in its support account resources which was not justified by its workload. Her delegation also felt that steps should be taken to provide the Mission Planning Service with assessed posts, and was concerned about the overlapping of functions between desk officers of the Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Peace-keeping Operations.

34. She called on the other Member States to discuss the adjustments that should be made to the Secretary-General's proposed staffing table to reflect those comments, and to make recommendations to enable the relevant departments to correct, by 1 July 1996, the anomalies articulated by the Board of Auditors. Moreover, her delegation reserved its position on the Secretary-General's proposed continuation of 61 temporary posts pending the outcome of the discussions to be held on the resources needed for the period beginning 1 July 1996. It believed it was unnecessary to maintain all of the posts until that date, especially since the Secretary-General had agreed not to fill the vacant posts in the interim.

35. With respect to non-staff resources, her delegation was concerned at the reintroduction of the proposal regarding the financing of the rental, in the amount of some US$ 3 million, of office space in the FF building by the Department of Peace-keeping Operations. The resources requested for that purpose in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 had been denied by the Member States and the report which the Advisory Committee had requested on the matter had not yet been submitted. Lastly, the budgeting practices adopted for non-staff costs relating to general temporary assistance (other than temporary assistance for meetings) and overtime should be viewed with caution.

36. Mr. TOYA (Japan) said that he was fully aware of the need to rationalize the operation of the support account taking into account the real needs existing at Headquarters with regard to the backstopping of peace-keeping operations, and that he accepted the proposal on that subject submitted by the Secretariat in so far as the justification for it and the structure envisaged were concerned. He endorsed the related recommendations of the Advisory Committee, especially those concerning the staffing table recommended for the period ending 30 June 1997. He noted that the Advisory Committee had been unable to understand the rationale and justification of staffing proposals for a number of units.

37. As to the modalities for the appropriation and assessment of resources for the support account, his delegation took note of the Advisory Committee's recommendation that those resources should be prorated among the individual peace-keeping operation budgets, and of the Controller's opinion regarding the feasibility of implementing that recommendation. It also endorsed a number of the recommendations and conclusions of the Board of Auditors, especially regarding the need to rectify irregular posts and to take steps to regularize appointments.

38. Mr. TAKASU (Controller) said that table 6 in paragraph 15 of the report of the Secretary-General contained a summary of support account resources for 1995, and that the figures for the years 1990 to 1994 could be found in annex VI to document A/49/717. The staffing tables proposed in the report of the Secretary-General resulted from a comprehensive "bottom-up" review carried out for all

units which had posts funded from the support account. They were based on the expected volume of work and of the anticipated needs for the next 12 months. As indicated in paragraphs 64 and 65 of annex II to the report of the Secretary-General, there had been a proposal to reduce from 11 to 9 the number of posts in the Audit and Management Consulting Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services funded from the support account on the basis of the 1996 audit plan. That plan included 2,000 staff days to be devoted to peace-keeping operations and took into account the anticipated liquidation of the accounts of the United Nations peace-keeping forces in the former Yugoslavia, UNAMIR and UNMIH. In total, the staffing table for the Office of Internal Oversight Services (including posts funded under the regular budget and extrabudgetary resources other than the support account) included 83 posts, as against 76 for the previous biennium.

39. He noted that the resources allocated to the secretariat of the Advisory Committee had been calculated on the basis of the workload anticipated as had the resources requested in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997. He also noted with great interest the Advisory Committee's recommendation that posts would be unequally distributed among the various units, and thought that some readjustment was needed. With regard to the leasing of premises, he observed that the ratio of posts to common staff costs (which served mainly to finance that item of expenditure) that had been applied to the 355 posts to be funded under the support account was the same as that applied to the posts funded under the regular budget.

40. Mr. RIESCO (Director of Conference Services), replied to the representative of Cuba, who had requested clarification regarding the publication and distribution in English only of certain documents of the current session of the Commission on Human Rights. He recognized that, in the past, the Division of Conference Services of the United Nations Office at Geneva had experienced serious difficulties in observing the rule concerning the simultaneous distribution of documents in the six official languages, on account of the late submission and excessive length of many documents, as well as the shortage of staff in the translation services and the inadequate storage capacity for documents already printed.

41. Since the beginning of 1995, however, a plan of action had been implemented in Geneva aimed at limiting documentation, essentially by strengthening documents control and ensuring better observance of the deadlines for the submission of documents, by threatening to refuse to accept documents which were submitted late or which exceeded the page limits set by the Secretary-General. Considerable progress had thus been achieved, particularly with regard to the pre-session documentation for the Commission on Human Rights, which for the current session exceeded 4,000 pages, or one third of the volume of pre-session documentation for the regular session of the General Assembly in New York. In 1996, the percentage of pre-session documents distributed in the six official languages prior to the opening of the Commission's session had reached a new record. Some documents, fewer than in the past, had been submitted extremely late (less than one week before the opening of the session), and were very long, some of them exceeding 100 pages. After the Centre for Human Rights had been informed that the documents in question could not be published in all languages before the opening of the session, it had been decided, in consultation with the

Centre, that those few documents would be published in English only. Previously, 70 per cent of the pre-session documentation had been produced during the session, which was still the case in New York during the regular session of the General Assembly.

42. He was therefore surprised that the question had been asked, at a time when considerable progress had been achieved. Moreover, he had been unable to find any announcement from the United Nations Office at Geneva, to the effect that the documents in question had been distributed in one language only on the instructions of the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Administration and Management. That Office had not been consulted, although it was aware of the plan of action in effect and of the general situation with regard to documentation in Geneva; there was no reason for it to have been consulted. Conference services at Headquarters could also have been consulted, but had not been; such a procedure would, in any event, have been unusual.

43. Mrs. ISE (Director, Specialist Services Division, replying to a question put by the representative of Uganda concerning the language training programme at Headquarters, said that while, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 36/235 of 18 December 1981, the staff of permanent missions were allowed to take the language courses offered at Headquarters free of charge if places were available, consideration was being given to a proposal that Secretariat staff and the staff of permanent missions should be required to pay for optional conversation courses in order to contribute to the savings of $104 million requested by the General Assembly in resolution 50/215.

44. Mrs. RODRIGUEZ ABASCAL (Cuba) said that the United Nations Office at Geneva had informed her delegation in Geneva that certain documents of the Commission on Human Rights had not been distributed in all languages on the instructions of the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Administration and Management, because of the financial situation of the Organization. Noting that the documents in question had been issued in English only after consultation with the Centre for Human Rights, she said that the Member States should have been consulted, especially in view of the difficulties that some of them would have in reading documents of more than 100 pages in a language not their own. Moreover, she understood that the decision to charge fees for certain language courses had already been made, and asked for further details from the Secretariat, pointing out, however, that such decisions were for the General Assembly to take.

45. Mr. SCOTTI (France) said that, since the question of human rights had been raised, he wished to point out that delegations and the Secretariat staff had the right to express themselves in the language of their choice, and that langauge training was a part of that panoply of rights. He did not recall that the resolution adopted at the thirty-sixth session had made any distinction between basic courses and conversation courses. In establishing such a distinction, the Secretariat would be going beyond what had been decided by the Member States. He also noted with concern that the Secretariat was anticipating the debate that would be held among Member States on the distribution of the savings. As the Cuban representative had said, it was clearly up to the General Assembly to decide whether it wished to go back on the decision it had taken at

its thirty-sixth session, and to determine how the $104 million in savings proposed by the Secretariat should be distributed.

46. Mr. MUÑOZ (Spain) said that he did not understand the distinction made between free courses and other courses for which enrolment fees would have to be paid. As the representatives of France and Cuba had observed, the initial General Assembly resolution had said nothing on the subject and the final decision was, in any event, up to the General Assembly. Moreover, the imposition of enrolment fees could not be justified by reference to a resolution concerning budgetary savings. Such fees would come under the category of income and thus would have no effect on expenditures.

47. Mr. RIESCO (Director of Conference Services) said that he shared the views of the Cuban, French and Spanish representatives. If the Secretariat was not able to issue documents in all the official languages for an intergovernmental body, it should consult the body in question, and it generally did so. He would contact conference services in Geneva to clarify the matter. He also acknowledged that the Secretariat could not take measures as part of the current budget cut-backs without referring them to the General Assembly.

48. Mrs. ISE (Director, Specialist Services Division), replying to the representative of Cuba, said that no enrolment fees would apply to regular courses organized as part of the basic programme, which followed a regular progression leading to a certificate of linguistic proficiency. It was rather a question of conversation courses that were part of a broader programme of instruction in communication techniques currently being implemented. In any case, no enrolment fees had yet been introduced. She had simply indicated that such a possibility was under consideration, pending the result of the General Assembly's deliberations on economy measures. The Cuban, French and Spanish representatives were right to stress the importance of improving the linguistic skills of the staff. On that point, there was no change.

AGENDA ITEM 120: SCALE OF ASSESSMENTS FOR THE APPORTIONMENT OF THE EXPENSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)

Report of the Committee on Contributions on the work of its special session (A/50/11/Add.1 and Corr.1)

49. Mr. APTSIAURI (Georgia) said that his Government had sent a letter dated 29 January 1996 to the Committee on Contributions containing a detailed explanation of its failure to pay its assessed contributions to the regular budget of the United Nations. His delegation had also made an oral representation at the special session. As a State Member of the United Nations, Georgia recognized its obligation to pay its assessment in full. Since its declaration of independence, however, Georgia had undergone serious political turmoil which had had a severe impact on its economic situation. Moreover, a significant portion of its budgetary resources had been allocated to meet the essential needs of some 350,000 refugees and displaced persons resulting from the conflicts taking place in some regions.

50. The per capita gross national product (GDP) of Georgia, together with that of Tajikistan, was the lowest among the members of the Commonwealth of

Independent States ($350 in 1994, according to World Bank figures). Nevertheless, the newly elected Parliament had approved the payment to the United Nations budget of the minimum required in order to avoid the application of Article 19 of the Charter. Although Georgia wished to clear its debt as quickly as possible, it was not in a position to pay the full amount of its contribution, estimated at $3.5 million, immediately. It therefore planned to pay it in four instalments during the course of the year. The Government had also drawn up a plan to cover the full amount of its arrears over the next three years.

51. The loss of the right to vote in United Nations bodies would be detrimental to Georgia's efforts to transform its economic and political structures. He therefore requested the Committee to endorse the recommendation made by the Committee on Contributions at its special session and allow his country to retain the right to vote while its Government made the necessary payments to the United Nations budget.

52. Ms. OSODE (Liberia) recalled that, at the special session of the Committee on Contributions, her delegation had explained the reasons why Liberia had been unable to make the minimum payment required under Article 19 of the Charter. Faced with the insurmountable economic, political and social problems and crippling financial constraints resulting from the civil war, Liberia had given precedence to the essential needs of its people over its legal and financial obligations.

53. Nevertheless, her country did not feel that it was released from its obligations because of the recommendation of the Committee on Contributions, and it had always recognized its obligation to pay its assessment in full and on time. The burden which that assessment represented should, however, be reduced in view of the conflict situation, the heavy debt burden and the other obstacles her country faced. Liberia intended to negotiate with the Organization a schedule of phased payments of its arrears.

54. Mr. BLUKIS (Latvia) said that his delegation supported the proposal made in connection with section III.A of the report of the Committee on Contributions (A/50/11/Add.1) that appropriate procedures should be established to govern the submission of requests for waivers of Article 19. If it had understood the proposal correctly, the General Assembly would request the Committee to recommend a systematic decision-making process to be applied to requests for waivers that would include guidelines for Member States regarding the information that should be presented, and would ensure that a final decision was made before the first vote in the General Assembly during the first year to which the request applied.

55. His delegation agreed with the recommendations in section III.B of the Committee's report. However, since the situation in Tajikistan, as reported in paragraph 38, seemed just as serious as that of Liberia, as described in paragraph 30, it believed that a similar decision should be made for both. It also supported the request of Georgia, subject to its payment of the required minimum during the current year.

56. In response to paragraph 28 of the report, which concerned his country directly, he said that the Government of Latvia reaffirmed its obligation to pay its contributions in full. Since it did not currently have adequate means to meet its own essential needs, it intended to search again for ways to make the minimum payment as soon as possible.

57. The Government of Latvia also reaffirmed its belief that the improvement of the financial situation of the United Nations depended largely on the manner in which its expenses were apportioned among Member States. The apportionment must be based, first of all, on the principle of the sovereign equality of all Member States (Art. 2, para. 1, of the Charter); that principle not only imposed on all States an obligation to pay their assessments, but also granted them the right to have that assessment established according to a single method based on capacity to pay, not according to different methodologies as had been the case recently. The Government of Latvia intended to pursue, in cooperation with other Member States, more equitable scales of assessment for both the regular and the peace-keeping budgets of the United Nations.

58. Ms. ARCHINI (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Union, drew attention to the exact wording of Article 19 of the Charter and said that it was time to define clear and strict procedures in connection with the submission of applications for exemptions. The European Union believed that Article 19 should apply as soon as a State accumulated more than two years of arrears in contributions, instead of almost three as was the current practice. The situation of Member States with genuine payment difficulties should be taken into account. A schedule of repayments should be submitted by those requesting a derogation from the application of Article 19.

59. The European Union took note of the comments of the Committee on Contributions and concurred with its recommendations that Rwanda and Liberia should be allowed to vote. Those waivers should be extended until the end of the fifty-first regular session of the General Assembly and should be subject to review before any further extension.

60. The European Union fully agreed with the Committee on Contributions that "a stringent standard" should apply to requests under Article 19 for permission to vote. As a first step, interested Member States should present their respective cases on the basis of a uniform plan and provide the necessary elements for a decision by the Committee. The Committee on Contributions should concentrate on the issue of the establishment of procedures to be applied to the submission of applications for exemption, and might also consider adjusting its calendar of meetings accordingly.

61. Mr. HUDYMA (Ukraine) noted that the Committee on Contributions had accomplished substantial work in order, despite some difficulties, to carry out the specific recommendations pertaining to waiver requests that had been submitted to it. He believed the Committee had been correct to recommend to the General Assembly that Liberia and Rwanda be permitted to vote despite their arrears.

62. It was unfortunate, however, that the Committee had been unable to approve the requests for a waiver of the application of Article 19 submitted by Georgia

and Tajikistan. Paragraphs 19, 30 and 38 of the Committee's report disclosed that those two countries were experiencing difficulties that were extremely similar to those facing Liberia. The Secretary-General had referred to such difficulties as "orphan conflicts", to which the United Nations had a responsibility to call attention. It appeared, however, that the Committee had been influenced by the fact that world opinion was less well informed about the case of those two countries than that of Rwanda or Liberia. With respect to Georgia, it would be fair if the General Assembly at least concurred with the observations made by the Committee on Contributions in paragraph 20 of its report and granted a temporary waiver to that country to extend through the end of the Assembly's fiftieth session, to allow Georgia to make the necessary minimum payment. The General Assembly had acted in a similar manner on a number of occasions. The Fifth Committee should review the case of Tajikistan carefully and grant it the waiver it requested.

63. More generally speaking, with regard to the stringent standard mentioned in paragraph 11 of the report of the Committee on Contributions, his delegation considered that the Committee should act as an independent technical body and advise the General Assembly on the basis of an impartial examination of each case. The issue was not to decide whether to act more stringently or flexibly; it was more important to devise objective criteria effectively and to ensure that the General Assembly applied to the Committee to study that issue. His delegation attached particular importance to the Committee's practice of adopting decisions by consensus, in particular with respect to the substantial issues it was called upon to discuss. There seemed to be no objection, however, to adopting decisions by majority when waivers of the application of Article 19 were requested. His delegation believed such a solution would be perfectly suited to the particular nature of the decisions to be adopted.

64. Mr. DEINEKO (Russian Federation) supported the general comments on how to proceed in the examination of requests submitted by Member States for a waiver of the application of Article 19. With regard to specific recommendations of the Committee on Contributions, the General Assembly would be acting correctly if it decided to waive the application of Article 19 in the case of Georgia. It should be emphasized that despite the very serious economic difficulties faced by Georgia and unresolved internal conflicts, that country was attempting to find the resources to make the minimum payment necessary as soon as possible. Since the Committee on Contributions had recalled that the General Assembly had, on a number of occasions, agreed to the temporary waiver of the application of Article 19 for countries in a situation similar to that of Georgia, it would be fair to follow that precedent and to allow Georgia to vote pending the receipt of the necessary payment in the near future.

65. His delegation fully endorsed the Committee's recommendations to waive the application of Article 19 in the case of Liberia and Rwanda, but it did not understand why Tajikistan was not among the countries which would be allowed to benefit from a waiver. In his delegation's view, the explanations contained in the note verbale submitted by that country very clearly illustrated the difficulties it faced. The civil war that had divided the country in 1992 and 1993 was a problem that directly concerned the United Nations. The fact that the Organization had sent a peace-keeping mission to Tajikistan meant that it had specific information regarding the situation there. The international

community was well aware of the natural disasters that had affected Tajikistan. World Bank experts had estimated that the cost of national reconstruction would amount to over $140 million. Paragraph 39 of the Committee's report (A/50/11/Add.1) indicated that some Member States, while recognizing the difficult situation facing Tajikistan, were not fully convinced that it constituted conditions beyond its control. All existing legal systems, however, acknowledged that war and natural disasters constituted conditions beyond a country's control. Even if there had been a doubt in the case in question, the General Assembly could grant Tajikistan the benefit of the doubt by waiving the application of Article 19 in its case.

66. Mr. ORANGE (Belarus) said that his delegation fully supported Tajikistan's request for a waiver of the application of Article 19. At its special session, the Committee on Contributions had been unable to adopt an unequivocal and clear decision regarding Tajikistan, despite the fact that it was obviously in a very difficult economic situation. Clearly, Tajikistan was currently unable to meet its financial obligations to the United Nations for objective reasons beyond its control. In that regard, it was important to highlight the political aspects of the problem. Tajikistan was known to be oscillating between war and peace; by deciding to send a peace-keeping mission to the country, the Security Council had recognized the seriousness of the situation. If the international community was willing to contribute effectively to the political stabilization of that region and thereby promote peace-keeping and prevent the outbreak of a conflict, it should assent to Tajikistan's request. The problem could also be approached from a different angle, namely, by asking what the international community and the United Nations would gain by depriving Tajikistan of its right to vote. Did they wish to help it improve its financial situation or punish it? His delegation also understood the explanations put forward by Georgia. That country was in a similar situation to that of Tajikistan. It had shown that it was willing to meet its financial obligations to the United Nations by submitting a payment plan for its arrears. Therefore, Belarus supported Georgia's request.

67. Mr. ATIYANTO (Indonesia) believed strongly in the principle that all Member States must pay their contributions in full, on time and without conditions, but also believed that specific cases of States which could not do so owing to circumstances beyond their control should be studied. He would therefore be grateful if the Chairman of the Committee on Contributions would clarify what he had said about the need, referred to in paragraph 11 of the Committee's report, to apply rigorous criteria to the study of waiver requests.

68. Mr. GOKHALE (India) strongly supported the recommendations of the Committee on Contributions to grant Rwanda and Liberia waivers of the application of Article 19, adding that those waivers should continue until the end of the fifty-first session. He also noted that the Committee, in paragraph 20 of its report, had shown understanding of Georgia's situation and that country's intention to make the minimum payment necessary before the beginning of the fifty-first session, and pay the balance of its arrears within three years. His delegation therefore supported suspending the application of Article 19 to that country until the end of the fiftieth session, on the understanding that it would indicate the payment plan it would adopt to pay the balance of its arrears

by the announced date. He also wished to point out that his delegation understood the difficulties faced by Tajikistan.

69. Mr. YAMAK (Turkey) approved the recommendations of the Committee on Contributions concerning waiving the application of Article 19 to Rwanda and Liberia. In addition, he supported the waiver requests from Tajikistan and Georgia, since the problems they were facing were well known to the international community.

70. Mr. AZYMBAKIEV (Kyrgyzstan) supported the recommendations of the Committee on Contributions concerning waiving the application of Article 19 to Rwanda and Liberia. He also noted that Tajikistan was in an equally disastrous situation, involving economic difficulties, civil war and natural catastrophes, which could undoubtedly be described as circumstances beyond the Government's control. By waiving the application of Article 19 for that country, the international community would show support for continuing the political dialogue which had been initiated there. Kyrgyzstan was in favour of the request for a waiver submitted by Georgia and hoped that it would be received favourably by all Member States.

71. Mr. VOHIDOV (Uzbekistan), while welcoming the favourable recommendations of the Committee on Contributions concerning Rwanda and Liberia, regretted that the same attitude had not been adopted concerning two other countries which found themselves in equally difficult situations, namely, Tajikistan and Georgia. A double standard seemed to have been applied. It would be paradoxical to say the least, at a time when those countries were requesting a waiver of the application of Article 19, for the General Assembly to forget that it had itself launched an appeal for assistance for those countries. Their cases therefore deserved to be re-examined, and it would be fair to grant the waiver that they had requested.

72. Mr. ODAGA-JALOMAYO (Uganda) shared the views expressed by Italy, speaking on behalf of the European Union, and by India, and also thought that the waivers granted should extend until the end of the fifty-first session. The purpose of Article 19 was not to discourage Member States from paying their contributions but rather to encourage them. He well understood the difficulties faced by the countries affected by Article 19 and hoped that, if Georgia fulfilled the commitments referred to in the report of the Committee on Contributions, its case would be given favourable consideration.

73. In addition, he was of the opinion that the recommendations of the Committee on Contributions were not final. The Committee could be asked to re-examine a case in light of new information, which was what the Member States should ask the Committee to do concerning the request from the Comoros.

74. Mrs. RODRÍGUEZ ABASCAL (Cuba) supported the recommendations of the Committee on Contributions concerning Rwanda and Liberia. She was also aware of the difficult situation in Georgia and Tajikistan, whose waiver requests she was prepared to support.

75. Mr. MIRMOHAMMAD (Islamic Republic of Iran) requested more information on the criteria by which the Committee on Contributions judged whether or not a

country's inability to make the minimum payment necessary in order to avoid losing its right to vote was a result of what it called, in paragraph 10 of its report, circumstances beyond its control. In other words, he would like to know what criteria the Committee applied in deciding to approve or reject a request for a waiver.

76. Mr. ETUKET (Chairman of the Committee on Contributions) explained, in response to the representative of Ukraine, that the Committee had based its decisions principally on two sources of information: the statistics relating to the economic and financial situation in the States in question and the complementary information supplied by the Secretariat. In response to the representative of Latvia, he indicated that the Committee, as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly, was governed by its rules of procedure, notably concerning the method for taking decisions. Replying to the question from Indonesia referring to paragraph 11 of the Committee's report, he pointed out that at the beginning of that paragraph, the Committee had noted that the General Assembly had waived the application of Article 19 in relatively few cases. In so doing, the Committee showed that the Assembly had never been lax in applying Article 19, and the Committee therefore intended to continue applying the same rigorous standards in examining requests for waivers. As for the request from the Comoros, which had been received too late for the Committee to examine it, it would indeed be up to the General Assembly, as the representative from Uganda had said, to decide whether or not to deal with the question itself or refer it back to the Committee, which would examine it during its session in June. Finally, in reply to the representative of Iran, he explained that the Committee had studied in depth the question of uniform criteria which it could apply, but in fact each request made of it had its unique characteristics; that was why it had decided on the basis of each specific situation whether or not the failure of the State in question to live up to its obligations had been due to circumstances beyond its control.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.